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A FATHER TO THE SOUL AND A SON TO THE BODY:
GENDER AND GENERATION IN ROBERT SOUTHWELL'S EPISTLE TO HIS FATHER

Following his arrest in June 1592 the Jesuit priest and poet Robert Southwell (1561-95) was imprisoned in the Tower of London, where he underwent torture, including the recently adopted practice of hanging by the hands. Sir Robert Cecil, who attended his examinations, was later heard to say of this method that 'they had a new kind of torture, no less cruel than the rack, and such that no man could bear it'; nonetheless, 'he had seen Robert Southwell, being thus suspended, remain as dumb as a tree-stump; and it had not been possible to make him utter one word.'¹ Cecil's choice of metaphor is chillingly apt, for images of trees are central to Southwell's own writing, where they stand in for the idea of generation, in all its various senses. And it was of course Southwell's refusal to comply with the Protestant practices demanded of members of his generation that landed him in the Tower. Also of interest here is Cecil's curiously sexless phrase 'no man could bear it', which seems to place Southwell beyond gender boundaries, inviting the reader to consider whether his apparently superhuman feat of endurance transcends his physical, masculine, state.

Taking Cecil's remarks as its point of departure, this essay is concerned with the relationship between the idea of generation and concepts of gender in Southwell's literary work. Both words ultimately derive from the same Latin root, '*genus*,' meaning 'stock',

¹ Cecil's remarks are reported by Father Henry Garnett, in a posthumous account of Southwell's torture and execution written in Italian and addressed to Aquaviva. Dated 7th March 1595, the document is held in the Jesuit archives at Farm Street and quoted in Pierre Janelle, *Robert Southwell the Writer: A Study in Religious Inspiration* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 66-67. Cecil's apparent admiration for Southwell's extraordinary silence under torture is recorded in Henry More's *Historia missionis Anglicanae Societas Jesu* (1660), 193; translated by Francis Edwards as *The Elizabethan Jesuits* (London: Phillimore, 1981), 243. Edwards considers Cecil's comments apocryphal.

‘race’ or ‘kind’, which gives rise to the verb ‘*generare*’, ‘to create’ or ‘to beget’.² This constellation of terms is laid out in the earliest English dictionaries, which appear shortly after Southwell’s death during the first part of the seventeenth-century. John Minsheu’s etymological lexicon, *Ductor in Linguas: The Guide Into Tongues* (1617), traces ‘a GENDER, as the masculine or feminine gender’ to the Latin ‘*genus*’, from which ‘a GENERATION or *genealogie*’ also derives, for example.³ In what follows I seek to understand the interplay of these related terms in Southwell’s work as an underground Jesuit priest to engender a process of conversion in his own family and the English population at large. In keeping with the aims of this collection as a whole, my essay will suggest that profoundly – indeed, productively – unstable notions of gender lie at the very heart of early modern conversion narratives, an argument I will here extend to embrace the etymologically related, and equally multivalent, concept of generation. Generation and gender are key terms through which Southwell encounters the world, defining the material and bodily experience that is central to his poetics and by which he seeks to effect conversion, a process I understand here (in keeping with other contributors to this volume) as a mode of affiliation, in which identity is constructed through sensory practices, including speech.⁴

Falling on the wrong side of the Elizabethan divide, Southwell wrote a series of substantial prose works, printed by Henry Garnet’s secret presses. These included the

² See *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) ‘generation, *n*’, and ‘gender, *n*’ (hereafter abbreviated to *OED*).

³ John Minsheu, *Ductor in Linguas: The Guide Into Tongues* (London, 1617), 213, 214.

⁴ In arguing that bodily experience is inseparable from the spiritual in Southwell’s writing my argument moves in the opposite direction to that of Gary Kuchar, who posits that the fashioning of the ‘ideal recusant subject’ in *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Teares* (London, 1591) involves a ‘transition from an inwardly divided, melancholic attachment to Christ’s literal body to [a] recognition of a spiritual, and consequently more complete, relation with the resurrected Christ.’ See Kuchar, ‘Gender and Recusant Melancholia in Robert Southwell’s *Mary Magdalene’s Funeral Tears*,’ in Ronald Corthell et al (eds.), *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 135-157, 136.

epistolary guide to enduring imprisonment and facing martyrdom *An Epistle of Comfort, to the Reverend Priestes, & to the Honorable, Worshipful, & other of the Laye sort, restrayned in Durance for the Catholicke fayth* (Paris [i.e. London], 1578-9), a series of consolatory letters addressed to the recusant Earl of Arundel following a bereavement in 1591, printed posthumously as *The Triumphs Over Death: Or, A Consolatorie Epistle, for afflicted mindes, in the affects of dying friends, &c.* (London, 1595), and a spiritual guide written for the Earl's wife, the Countess of Arundel, but directed towards pious Catholic noblewomen at large, *A Shorte Rule of Good Life, &c.* ([Douai?], 1596-7). It is Southwell's poetry for which he is best known, and that has had most influence upon both his contemporaries and successors, however. Circulated in manuscript amongst the Catholic community during his lifetime, Southwell's lyrics attempted to reclaim the form, then inevitably identified with love poetry, as a vehicle for spiritual verse. They were published in the wake of his execution by the Protestant printer John Wolfe, who divested them of all references to overtly Catholic content (such as the Virgin Mary, and the name of the author), and titled the collection *Saint Peters Complaint, With Other Poemes* (London, 1595). The success of the volume is attested by the fact that seven further editions appeared over the following two decades.⁵ A need to redress such imbalances has ensured that Southwell's Catholic faith has been the determining factor in many previous accounts of his poetics, with a very few notable exceptions.⁶ I proceed here from the presumption that scholarly attention to the question of Southwell's religion has

⁵ See STC, 2nd ed. 22956-22962.

⁶ The late Anne Sweeney's work has been instrumental in redefining Southwell studies, urging critics to move beyond the heavily biographical readings of Southwell's poetry through the lens of his martyrdom, and to consider political, social and other factors. See her *Robert Southwell: Snow in Arcadia: Redrawing the English Lyric Landscape, 1586-95* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). The previously prevailing martyrological approach is typified by Scott Pilarz's *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2004) and Christopher Devlin's *The Life of Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956).

eclipsed consideration of the other forces that drive him, however; his relationship to his family, particularly the older generations of Southwells, and a particular sense of gender identity, based upon an intensely physical understanding of bodily experience, are as much a part of his writing as his recusancy, I will suggest.

In 1595, after holding his silence for nearly three years, ‘dumb as a tree-stump’ even under torture, Southwell unexpectedly writes to Cecil confirming his Catholicism and thus condemning himself to a long-awaited execution. His letter states that Southwell had returned to England from the relative safety of the Jesuit College in Rome in order to minister to his family, whose conformity to the Reformed Church he bitterly regretted, and whom he hoped to (re)convert, persuading them to return to the Catholic faith.⁷ We might note here that in early modern England being ‘born again’ into true religion, whichever side of the doctrinal divide one stood upon, was known as the process of ‘regeneration’.⁸ The hope his family might be ‘regenerated’ in the specific sense I have just outlined also lies behind Southwell’s shorter prose work *An Epistle of a Religious Priest unto his Father*, which was written upon his return from Rome in May 1586, and which Southwell signs as ‘Your most dutiful and loving son’.⁹ Dutiful it may be, but

⁷ Southwell had left England for the Catholic colleges of Douai and, subsequently, Rome in June 1576, remaining in the English Colleges there for a decade, during which time he petitioned for, and was later awarded, admission to the Jesuit order (his initial application was refused). So long was his absence that on his return Southwell had to relearn his mother tongue in order to minister to the English recusant community, according to Sweeney, *Robert Southwell: Snow in Arcadia*, 99-100. See also Nancy Pollard Brown, ‘Southwell, Robert (1561-1595)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), hereafter abbreviated to *ODNB*.

⁸ See the entries for ‘*regenerate*, borne againe’, and ‘*regeneration*, a new birth,’ in Robert Cawdry, *A Table Alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes...* (London, 1604), H2^r.

⁹ The *Epistle* was first printed by Garnett’s second secret press, appended to *A short rule of good life. Newly set forth according to the authours direction before his death* (London, 1597) [STC, 2nd Ed. 22968.5, ESTC S95268]. Because this volume is exceedingly rare, and the EEBO version incomplete, and because we still lack a modern scholarly edition of this work (J.W. Trotman’s 1914 Catholic Library text is extremely problematic), my citations here are taken from a more readily accessible subsequent edition,

loving it certainly is not. The text is extraordinary in its tone: belligerent, threatening and seemingly lacking in any compassion for what Southwell sees to be his father's inevitable fate, should he fail to return to the Catholic faith. Moreover, there is none of the intergenerational deference, the respect for one's elders that we might expect to find in such a document.¹⁰

Southwell's *Epistle* outlines a horrifying vision of his father's 'departing-bed', asking that he imagine himself 'burdened with the heavy load of your former trespasses, and gored with the sting and prick of a festered conscience', feeling 'the cramp of death wresting your heart-strings' (207). In lines that seem to pre-empt John Donne's more famous poem, 'The Apparition,' Southwell laments, 'O how much would you give for one hour of repentance!' (207), evoking the Catholic concept of the deathbed revocation of sins.¹¹ The *Epistle* goes on to attack what Southwell sees as his father's decision to privilege worldly concerns over spiritual ones, by attempting to protect what was then a vast fortune from recusancy fines. 'Why then,' he asks, using the terms of a business transaction, 'do you not at the least devote that small remnant and surplusage of these your latter days, procuring to make an atonement with God, and to free your conscience from such corruption as by your schism and fall hath crept into it?' (211). The schism

printed at St Omer by John Heigham in 1622 [STC 2nd Ed. 22970, ESTC 106293], 240. Subsequent page numbers appear in the text. I will return to the complex publication history of this work below.

¹⁰ 'The maintenance of three basic hierarchies was deemed essential to an ordered household – and, by implication, an ordered society: ideally, husbands should govern wives; masters and mistresses their servants; and parents their children,' writes Alexandra Shephard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3. Southwell's lack of subservience might thus be interpreted as a political gesture as much as a familial one.

¹¹ Whilst Louis Martz, in a seminal study of meditative verse, has explored Southwell's influence upon a subsequent generation of devotional poets, most notably George Herbert, his role as a possible source of inspiration for Donne has been thus far overlooked, a fact that seems particularly odd when one considers that he himself grew up as a Catholic around the time Southwell was writing, and only converted to Protestantism later in life. Southwell's evocation of his father's death-bed scene and his urgings to repent before it is too late seem directly traceable to poems such as this, and even Donne's famous sermon on his own death. Cf. chapter on 'Southwell and Herbert' in Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954).

alluded to here not only divides Southwell's father from what his son sees as the true church; it also divides him from his son. The Southwell family's history was rife with conversions and reconversions, leading to multiple instances of intergenerational conflict of this sort. Whilst Robert Southwell, and quite probably his mother, would continue to adhere to Catholicism, his grandfather, Richard Southwell, had been responsible for the violent destruction of several monasteries in the area of Norfolk where Robert spent his childhood, including the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, just a day's ride from the Southwell family home at Horsham St Faith (itself built in the ruins of a Benedictine Abbey).¹² The frequent recurrence of ruins among Southwell's poetic imagery attest to the rich associations these destructive acts held for him.¹³ Robert Southwell's father, also called Robert, was actually the illegitimate son of Richard Southwell, the product of an affair with a married woman who only later became his wife. This led to ongoing legal battles within the family, which would ultimately decimate the large Southwell fortune.

The sixteenth-century saw a rise in interest in genealogy, the tracing of one's family tree.¹⁴ The image of familial interconnection conceived of as a tree is vividly rendered in the *Epistle*, in an image that pre-emptly Southwell's own 'tree-stump' like silence under torture: 'O good Sir! shall so many of your branches enjoy the quickening

¹² See Pollard Brown, 'Southwell, Robert (1561-1595),' and Stanford Lehmberg, 'Southwell, Richard (1502/3-1654),' *ODNB*.

¹³ 'The prodigall chylds soule wracke' describes the eventual salvation of one who has been an exile from faith, for example, 'Till mercy rayseed me from my fall, | And grace my ruines did repaire.' I quote Southwell's poetry here and throughout this essay from Anne Sweeney and Peter Davidson (eds.), *Robert Southwell: Collected Poems* (Manchester: Fyfield Books for Carcanet Press, 2007), 38. This edition is the first to offer an adequate representation of his verse as it initially circulated in manuscript, before they were sanitized for the 1595 publication.

¹⁴ On the popularity of genealogy see Graham Parry, *Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Angus Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

sap and fry of God's Church, and daily shooting up higher towards Heaven, bring forth the flowers and fruits of salvation,' Southwell asks his father, 'and you that are the root of us all lie barren and fruitless, still covered in earth and buried in flesh and blood?' (236-37). Southwell's metaphor might be construed as the archetypal image of generation, in its two most frequently used senses, suggesting both growth and – simultaneously – a group of offspring born to a parent. The term 'genealogy' is itself part of the nexus of words grouped around the Latin root *genus*, as the lexicographer Robert Cawdry makes clear in what is (deservingly) considered the first English dictionary: '*genealogie*, (g[reek]) generation, or a describing of the stock or pedigree,' he writes.¹⁵ But Southwell here departs from the conventional life-giving associations of the figure of the family tree, adding a macabre twist here: his father, 'root of us all', is 'buried in flesh and blood'. His misplaced faith, as Southwell sees it, has effectively buried him alive, just as he had been considered dead to his family upon his entry into the Catholic Church. Generation has slipped into degeneration, and the tree is 'barren and fruitless'.

In subverting this traditional image of generation, Southwell is not alone. It is an unfortunate consequence of Southwell's singular biography and particularly the isolating effects of his recusancy that his work is rarely read alongside that of other members of his generation, an oversight that Alison Shell has recently attempted to correct, arguing that the reception of Southwell's verse is far broader than previously recognized and the influence of his attempts to create a newly pious poetry has been hugely underestimated.¹⁶ Throughout this essay I will address the rather unexpected yet close relationship between Southwell and one of his peers, whose work was published in the

¹⁵ Cawdry, *Table Alphabeticall*, C3r.

¹⁶ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 'The Invisible Influence of Robert Southwell', p.58ff.

same volume as some of his writings, and who shares some of his strikingly subversive imagery. Sir Walter Raleigh is the author of a peculiarly nasty and – for him – unconventional poem addressed ‘To His Son’, which upsets the usual connotations of the image of the tree of life in ways familiar to readers of Southwell’s *Epistle*. In what might be considered a drastically modified version of the advice letter, a genre I will be much concerned with in this essay, Raleigh bitterly entreats his son to modify his behaviour or else face the consequences, which he unflinchingly articulates and of which he was all too aware, as he writes the verse from prison where he was awaiting trial for treason.¹⁷ The sonnet is tightly constructed, suffocatingly so, one might say, and hence needs to be quoted in full:

Three things there bee that prosper vp apace
And flourish, whilest they growe a sunder farr,
But on a day, they meet all in one place,
and when they meet, they one an other marr;
And they bee theise, the wood, the wiide, the wagg.
The wood is that, which makes the Gallow tree,
The weed is that, which stringes the Hangmans bagg,
The wagg my pritty knave betokeneth thee.
Marke well deare boy whilest theise assemble not,
Green springs the tree, hempe growes, the wagg is wilde,
But when they meet, it makes the timber rott,
It fretts the halter, and it choakes the childe.
Then bless thee, and beware, and lett vs praye,
wee part not with the at this meeting day.¹⁸

Critical readings of this poem have emphasized what has been perceived as its wittiness and tongue-in-cheek tone, interpretations that strongly derive from the consoling final couplet which seems to lay the more disturbing implications of what has gone before to

¹⁷ Mark Nicholls and Penny Williams, ‘Raleigh, Sir Walter (1554-1618)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁸ *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Agnes C. Latham (London, 1929), 102.

rest.¹⁹ But when one takes into account the fact that this final couplet exists in only one of the four extant manuscript copies of the poem, and that in the other versions the sonnet ends abruptly after the three quatrains and is left incomplete, interrupted by the gasping alliteration of ‘it choakes the childe’, the piece starts to look very different.²⁰ In Raleigh’s witty conceit the ‘Three things’ that grow together here – ‘The wood,’ ‘The weed’ and ‘The wagg’ – are not generative but rather destructive, combining to prematurely end the life of his son. Rather than symbolizing intergenerational relationships, the ‘wood’ here serves to make ‘the Gallow tree’; like Southwell’s image of his father as ‘root of us all’, this family tree is rotten through.²¹

How might we read Southwell’s *Epistle to his Father* in the light of this kind of iconographic subversion of the archetypal image of generation? It should first be noted that Southwell’s concern in writing the letter is with the fate of his father’s soul, rather than that of his body. As such, the regeneration of his spiritual life takes all precedence over the merely physical relationship between father and son. Furthermore, Southwell understands the only truly meaningful familial relationship to be that between mankind and a divine Father. In a society where images of paternity proliferated, offering an image for patriarchal power, as well as the Christian God, Southwell subject biological fatherhood to this more metaphorical sense, an idea he also extends to maternity as

¹⁹ Latham’s commentary on this poem sets the tone, declaring that it was ‘written in a light hearted moment,’ *Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 186.

²⁰ See again Latham’s commentary, which notes that ‘*MS Malone omits ll. 13, 14 and has instead* God blesse the Child,’ *Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 186.

²¹ In Southwell’s poetry one is likewise never far from a reminder of the darker side of the human covenant with God, and its ability to destabilize relationships between successive generations. Imagining Mary’s torments in ‘The virgin mary to Christ on the Crosse’, Southwell adopts her voice:

Thou messenger that didst impart,
His first discent into my womb,
Come helpe me now to cleave my heart,
That there I may my sonne intombe.

Like Raleigh’s very different poem ‘To His Son’, the deadening rhyme of ‘womb’ with ‘tomb’ here serves as a harsh reminder that children sometimes die before their parents. See Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 61.

well.²² As Southwell makes clear in the *Epistle*, ‘He cannot have God for his Father that refuseth to profess the Catholic Church for his Mother’ (232). What Southwell terms ‘carnal consanguinity’ is coincidental (192); in yet another iteration of the tree imagery that recurs repeatedly in Southwell’s work, flesh and blood are ‘but bark and rind of a man.’ (193) Thus devotion to God supplants dedication to one’s parents.²³

In seeking to contextualize this uncompromising stance further it is helpful to consider the particular restrictions under which early modern notions of tolerance functioned. In her book *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700*, Alexandra Walsham lays out what might seem to the modern reader the paradoxical status of the value of tolerance in the English Renaissance. Whereas today tolerance is ‘idealized as a virtue’, at the time in which Southwell wrote it was more likely to be construed as a dangerous ‘recipe for chaos and anarchy,’ she writes.²⁴ ‘Together with other terms which implied a willingness to condone diversity and a conciliatory attitude towards doctrinal heterodoxy,’ toleration in fact ‘was a weapon in polemical controversy, a word used to wound, hurt, brand, stigmatise and slur’; some, she notes, ‘even went so far as to boast of their intolerance.’²⁵ In sixteenth and seventeenth-

²² On the political applications of the metaphor of fatherhood, see Su Fang Ng, *Literature and the Politics of Family in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²³ How do we reconcile this to notions of piety, a word that in its Anglo-Norman and Middle French versions explicitly implied a ‘respect and devotion for parents’? It is this sense, it should be remembered, that lies at the root of the word ‘piety’ in the Latin ‘pietas’, expressing dutifulness, most commonly associated with respect and devotion to one’s parents in classical literature. To what extent might we consider this a pious document? In post-classical Latin the word ‘pietas’, from which ‘piety’ derives, also encompasses not only a ‘fervent attachment to the service of God and to the duties and practices of religion’ but also the notion of compassion, or pity. In Middle English the nouns ‘pity’ and ‘piety’ both include these twin senses, and it was not until the seventeenth-century that the separation of the two words was completed. See ‘piety, *n*’ and ‘pity, *n*’, *OED*. Is it true to say that the letter’s concern for the spiritual life of Southwell’s father embodies the dutiful sense of the word ‘piety’, at the cost of rejecting the more loving or compassionate senses of the term?

²⁴ Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1.

²⁵ Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 5.

century thought tolerance was thus often held to be misguided, merited only where one wished to condone the spiritual practices of another and wrongly applied at potentially great cost to the soul of the recipient. Such is Southwell's view of the dangers of sanctioning his father's conformity. One has to be cruel to be kind, his *Epistle* suggests, in its most basic terms, and the etymological relationship between 'kind', in the sense of generosity of spirit, and 'kind', in the sense of a familial or societal connection, is worth keeping in mind here.²⁶ The word 'kind' also owes its ultimate origins to the Latin '*genus*', parent of 'generation' and 'gender' as we have already seen, and thus suggests both a fundamental underlying similarity (being of the same family, as in 'mankind'), and a category of things (the means by which they are distinguished, as in a 'genre').²⁷

Let us recall for a moment that a 'genre' is a 'kind' of text. The stylistic effects of Southwell's somewhat extreme rhetorical position become even more conspicuous if we consider the work alongside other, more conventional examples of the genre to which it belongs, and as which it would have been received: the letter of advice. This 'subdivision of the Conduct Book', as it has been described by Agnes Latham, was extremely popular in the late-sixteenth, and particularly early-seventeenth centuries, with notable examples produced by King James I, William Cecil, Lord Burghley and Francis Osborne.²⁸ Such

²⁶ Southwell deploys a similar rhetoric in his letter to Cecil confessing his Catholicism and asking for the martyrdom he would soon receive: 'in extreme courses it hath ever been counted a kind of pity to kill quickly and an argument of some mercy to be but a while unmerciful,' he writes. See Nancy Pollard Brown (ed.) *Two Letters and Short Rules of Good Life* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1973), 77.

²⁷ The etymological equivalence of the two words is masked by the effects of what is known by linguists as Grimm's Law, according to which 'g' sounds become 'k' over time. See John Algeo and Thomas Pyles, *The Origins and Development of the English Language*, Sixth Edition (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2005), 71-73.

²⁸ Agnes Latham, 'Sir Walter Raleigh's *Instructions to his Son*', in Herbert Davis and Helen Gardner (eds.), *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies (Presented to Frank Percy Wilson in honour of his seventieth birthday)* (Oxford: OUP, 1959), 199- 218, 199. The examples mentioned above are: James I, [*Basilikon Doron*] *Or his majesties instructions to his dearest sonne, Henry the prince* (Edinburgh, 1603) (the work had been anonymously issued four years previously); William Cecil, *Certaine precepts, or directions, for the well*

works usually contained guidelines on how to choose one's friends, one's wife and one's wardrobe (in order of importance, we can only assume), and admonitions to avoid excessive eating, drinking and talking. Most relevant here is that written by Raleigh, titled *Instructions to His Sonne*, which was issued in the same volume as Southwell's *Epistle*, posthumously printed in 1632. The combination of these two works was a surprising one. Raleigh's work might be described as wholly conventional, in striking contrast to the poem 'To His Son' we have just read, whereas Southwell's *Epistle* makes several radical departures from the generic norm. The success of this co-publication is however evidenced by sales of the book, which went through five editions in four years, reaching an audience of potential converts far beyond the ostensibly domestic addressees of its contents.²⁹

The most obvious way in which Southwell's *Epistle* subverts the generic expectations of the advice letter is its reversal of the roles of advisor and advisee, a gesture that, while not unique amongst examples of the genre, is certainly unusual.³⁰ In just one instance of the way in which the English Reformation divided families and caused intergenerational conflict, the son here sees fit to lecture his father on his personal conduct. Southwell's second, and more interesting, departure from the conventions of the advice letter is to deliberately reverse the notion that wisdom is the fruit of experience, and thus, inevitably, the domain of one's elders. 'He may be a father to the soul that is a

ordering of a mans life: left by a father of eminent note and place in this kingdome (London, 1617); Francis Osborne, *Advice to a Son; Or, Directions for your better conduct* (Oxford, 1655).

²⁹ See STC, 2nd ed. 20641.5-20646.

³⁰ A fascinating, Protestant, analogue is James Wadsworth the younger's account of his father's recusancy, *The English Spanish Pilgrime. Or, A New Discoverie of Spanish Popery, and Jesuiticall Strategems, &c.* (London, 1629). Wadsworth denounces his father's Catholicism, terming his own return to 'his true mothers bosome, the Church of England,' on the title page. Wadsworth only publishes his 'advice' after his father's death, however. See A.J. Loomie, 'Wadsworth, James [*pseud.* Diego de Vadesfoote] (b.1604),' *ODNB*.

son to the body, and requite the belief of his temporal life by reviving his parent from a spiritual death,' Southwell explains (195). 'Hoary senses are often couched under green locks,' he says elsewhere, 'and some are riper in the spring than others in the Autumn of their age.' (190-91) A model for this counter-intuitive piece of logic is hinted at in Southwell's poetry, where we find an echo of this image in a description of 'Christes Childhoode':

In springing lockes laye couched hoary Witt
In semblant younge a grace and auncient port
In lowly lookes high majestie did sitt
In tender tongue sound sense of sagest sort.³¹

Christ's preternatural 'Witt', even at 'twelve yeres age', provides the ultimate example of natural wisdom for Southwell, who believes that an entire universe of understanding is collapsed into the short span of Christ's life. It is perfectly possible, he suggests, to be born with an inner spiritual intelligence that surpasses all other kinds of education, 'old in the cradle', to borrow a phrase from one of Southwell's better known poems, 'Saint Peters Complaynt'.³² The pastoral role of the 'father' here supersedes any biological concept of paternity. Throughout Southwell's verse the intuitive knowledge of childhood is prized over the learned experience of age, and the passive acceptance of divine revelation over the active seeking out of learning. As we have seen elsewhere in this volume, childhood itself has an often paradoxical status in the period, serving as a metaphor for, or supplement to, gender categories.³³

³¹ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 10.

³² Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 63-85.

³³ See Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh's Introduction, 'Early Modern Children as Subjects: Gender Matters,' in Miller and Yavneh, (eds.), *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1-14, 1.

This figuration of the contradictory nature of divine wisdom seems to inform Southwell's poetry as a whole, in which he repeatedly employs the rhetorical device of the paradox in both structuring and elaborating his verse. Paradox, Southwell's writing reminds us, lies at the heart of Christianity; out of it grows true faith and through its distinctive form of logic the literary experience of this faith is generated. As he writes in 'A childe my Choyce': 'Though yonge yet wise though small yet stronge though man yet god he is.'³⁴ The configuration of man as God represents perhaps the most essential of these paradoxical truths for Southwell. 'Behould the father is his daughters sonne', begins 'The Nativity of Christ', an apparent impossibility that can only be resolved by the logic of faith.³⁵ The paradoxes of a daughter giving birth to her father, a mortal being delivering the immortal, and of Mary's immaculate conception ('Wife did she live, yet virgin did she die,' begins 'Our ladyes Spousals'), all reflect the ultimate paradox lying at the heart of Southwell's Christian understanding: that of the eucharist.³⁶ Paradox, Southwell's writing reminds us, lies at the heart of the Christian experience; it is thus key to any process of conversion (literally, a 'turning').³⁷ 'Of the Blessed Sacrament of the Aulter' uses language reminiscent of Southwell's poems on Mary's miraculous pregnancy to describe how 'The god of hoastes in slender hoste doth dwell'; the poem's

³⁴ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 12.

³⁵ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 6.

³⁶ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 4. Paradox also central to martyrdom, and the notion of dying in order to embrace an eternal life is an idea that is ever-present in Southwell's work as one can only assume it must have been in his life. Even the process of becoming a martyr was infused with paradox, with the outcome of a trial often resting on a prisoner's answer to what was known as 'The Bloody Question', in which they were asked to choose whether they would side with the Pope over the Queen if his forces invaded England. Neither answer was of course acceptable, an inescapable paradox sure to result in charges of treason.

³⁷ We might think further about the relationship between conversion and paradox, I think – the rhetorical figure succinctly summarized by Richard Lanham as: 'A seemingly self-contradictory statement, which is yet shown to be (sometimes in a surprising way) true.' Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 107. Conversion – to the view of Jesuit missionaries like Southwell – is a process of revealing the truth that has underlain a contradictory exterior all along.

animating force is generated by the obvious pun upon heavenly ‘hoastes’ of angels and the eucharistic ‘hoste’, in which two differing meanings paradoxically coincide in a single term.³⁸ The eucharist is for Southwell the supreme example of generation, operating according to the paradoxically generative logic of ‘two-in-one’, from which the Christian faith itself, not to mention the most hotly contested of debates between Catholics and Protestants, is begotten.

Southwell’s subversion of the genre of the advice letter – by reversing the usual roles of advisor and advisee, father and son, and by paradoxically conflating wisdom with youth, rather than age, in a manifestation of the greater paradoxes underpinning Christian experience itself – can be further understood by exploring connections between the *Epistle* and a further subcategory of the conduct book, the mother’s legacy. Authors of these extremely popular texts included Elizabeth Grymeston (*Miscellanea, Meditations, Memoratives*, [London, 1604?]), Dorothy Leigh (*The Mother’s Blessing*, [London, 1616]), Elizabeth Josceline (*The Mothers Legacie to her Unborn Child*, [London, 1622]) and Elizabeth Richardson (*The Ladies Legacy*, [London, 1645]). Considering Southwell’s *Epistle* in the context of these volumes allows us to bring a third, etymologically-related, key term into our discussions, addressing explicitly the role of gender, in conjunction with the concepts of generation and ideas of genre that I have thus far considered.³⁹

Let us begin by considering a particularly pertinent example here, that of an anonymous treatise in this tradition ostensibly written by a mother begging her recusant son, who is living and studying at the Catholic College at Douai as she writes, to recant his faith and return home. The martyrdom sought by the son is a mother’s greatest fear.

³⁸ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 23.

³⁹ Interestingly, the term ‘gender’ had its grammatical significance before it was used to denote the distinction between male and female, see ‘gender, *n*’, *OED*.

Published in 1627, *A Mothers Teares Over Hir Sedvced Sonne* follows Southwell's *Epistle* in its unflinching depiction of the inevitability of death, the ever-present implicit rhyme of womb and tomb.⁴⁰ A child 'may miscarry for want of thy care,' its author reminds all mothers, but bleakly recognizes 'so may it notwithstanding all thy care' (A4^r). As she observes acutely:

Thy child is a doubtfull commodity. There is a peradventure in all things good and evill under the Sunne, that may befall him, except one. It is borne, perhaps it may grow up, perhaps not, and so on, perhaps so, perhaps not. Thou canst not say, perhaps it may die, perhaps not: That is as certaine, as other things are uncertaine: if it doe grow up like the floure, it shall be cut downe like the grasse: no peradventure there...⁴¹

Like Southwell, the anonymous author of the tract derives her matter-of-fact tone from the metaphors of business, comparing her child to a 'doubtfull commodity' just as the vocabulary of commerce permeates the *Epistle to his Father*. There is something of the studied nonchalance of Raleigh's painfully witty sonnet here too; as the apparently casual phrasing, 'perhaps it may grow up, perhaps not,' belies a deeper anguish. Moreover, we see the traditional imagery of generation, that of the growth of plants, savagely undercut in ways that reflects the governing trope of the *Epistle*, 'the floure' brutally 'cut downe like the grasse'. As the anonymous author goes on to say, a disobedient child is but 'a barren piece of mould' that 'brings forth nothing of it selfe but *briars* and *thornes*' (A4^r). In a disturbing twist, metaphors of natural growth are turned to destructive effect at such moments; the imagery – like that of the *Epistle* – is all the more powerful because of its paradoxical qualities.

⁴⁰ Anon., *A Mothers Teares Over Hir Seduced Sonne: Or A dissuasive from Idolatry, &c.* (London, 1627). Subsequent page numbers appear in the text. Compare Augustine's account of his mother's attempts to convert him to Christianity in Book 3 of *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ *A Mothers Teares*, A4^r.

A Mothers Teares also contains an epistle from the son in which he defends his decision and denounces his mother's entreaties as an 'unreasonable, nay unnaturall' demand, in rhetoric that strikingly resembles that which Southwell directs towards his own father (B3^v). This son's letter asks that his mother defer to the higher maternal authority proclaimed by adherents to the Catholic Church, that of the Virgin Mary: 'submit your selfe to her, who as a loving Mother would receive and embrace you,' he urges, 'first be instructed by her, Deare Mother, and then shall you learne to governe and guide your owne Children in thinges that are good' (B4^r). As in the case of Southwell's *Epistle*, the traditional location of parental wisdom is transferred, here onto a very different mother figure, and, implicitly, onto the son that has chosen to supplant his own biological mother with that of his faith. In order to educate her children, he suggests, a mother must be educated herself in an act of childlike self-abjuration. The author of *A Mothers teares* responds to such rhetoric by insisting to an unusual degree on the physicality of her experience of motherhood, the tears her son has brought her to and the aching of her 'bowels' (or to modern understanding, the womb), mirroring the prevalence of tears in Southwell's own affective vocabulary.⁴² If the son's letter adopts the patriarchal condescension that characterizes the popular posture of the father's advice letter to his child, the mother here puts her own gender at the forefront of her recasting of the genre in maternal form.

⁴² See, for instance, 'A Vale of Tears', in Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 36-8 and his prose-poem, *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares*. The latter's influence beyond Catholic circles is attested by Thomas Nashe's imitation of it in *Christs Teares over Jerusalem, &c.* (London, 1593), noted – and mocked – by Gabriel Harvey. See Scott R. Pilarz, S.J., *Robert Southwell, and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595: Writing Reconciliation* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2004), xx.

A Mothers Teares both borrows from, and helps to solidify, the emerging conventions of its own form.⁴³ Its author refers to many of the popular examples of the genre listed above in her preface in which she self-consciously takes on their mantle, situating her work firmly within this ongoing literary history, much as the publication of Southwell's *Epistle* alongside Raleigh's work positioned the text within the genre of advice letters written by fathers to sons. As Marsha Urban has recently observed in her study of *Seventeenth-Century Mother's Advice Books*, such works are typically pious in content and deferential in tone, with their authors making much show of their inadequacy as writers and the unsuitability of their scribblings for publication, a display quite deliberately calculated, it seems, to offset any readerly sense of the impropriety of female authors.⁴⁴ *A Mothers Teares* is a pious document in this tradition, displaying all the signs of (false) modesty associated with such works, including the trope of reluctance to publish: 'I could not, whether for want of witt, or too much propensitie to talke (both if thou wilt, it is no great impeachment to a woman) couth my answer within the scantling of a letter,' its author explains, 'Whence it hapned, that a friend desiring a Copy, tooke a readier way for 500, then he could with his pen transcribe one, and so printed it beyond the seas' (A2^v). Responsibility for the decision to publish is thus put onto the shoulders of the 'friend', in a gesture wholly characteristic of writing by both women and men in the early modern period.

At the same time, as I have suggested, its author departs from such conventions in provocative ways, including for example the interpolated voice of her son, both in the

⁴³ On the genre see Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2011), Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2005), and Marsha Urban, *Seventeenth-Century Mother's Advice Books* (New York & Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁴⁴ Urban, *Mother's Advice Books*, 5.

form of his own epistle and a series of interjections in her text, which takes the atypical form of a dialogue. In the introduction to an important collection of essays considering the relationship between genre and gender in early modern England Michelle Dowd and Julia Eckerle somewhat contentiously argue that ‘the experimentation with form was a fundamental characteristic of women’s life writing,’ inferring a self-conscious literariness that could be open to question.⁴⁵ Citing Nigel Smith’s case for directly relating the ‘generic inventiveness and eclecticism’ that characterizes seventeenth-century women authors to the way in which autobiographical forms such as the advice book construct identity and function as ‘a means through literary structure of exploring potentials and acknowledging limitations in relation to the world’, Dowd and Eckerle more persuasively suggest that ‘The categories of genre, gender, and identity were thus mutually constitutive in early modern England.’⁴⁶

We see precisely this dynamic at work in Elizabeth Grymeston’s *Miscellanea*, a gathering of diverse textual fragments that expands the genre of the advice book to include poems, ‘A Madrigall’ and proverbs, as well as the ‘*Prayers. Meditations. Memoratiues*’ mentioned in her subtitle to the work. Addressing herself to Bernye Grymeston, ‘*My dearest sonne*’, the author’s preface draws an explicit and physical connection between the experience of motherly love and the form this love takes upon the page: the advice book. In a series of connected subclauses that render each of her points the inevitable logical outcome of its predecessor Grymeston writes that

there is no thing so strong as the force of loue; there is no loue so forcible as the loue of an affectionate mother to her naturall childe: there is no mother can either

⁴⁵ Michelle Dowd and Julia Eckerle, *Genre and Women’s Life Writing In Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

⁴⁶ *Genre and Women’s Life Writing*, 4. See Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640-1660* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 5.

*more affectionately shew her nature, or more naturally manifest her affection, than in aduising her children out of her owne experience, to eschew euill, and encline them to do that which is good.*⁴⁷

Gender blends seamlessly into the etymologically-related question of genre here, as writing guidance for a child ‘*out of her owne experience*’ is presented as the natural culmination of motherhood itself.

Like the author of *A Mothers Teares*, and in a way highly reminiscent of Southwell’s *Epistle*, Grymeston places physical experience at the heart of the entreaties she makes to her son here. An allusion to her own bodily suffering, a ‘*languishing consumption*’ as she calls it in the preface to the *Miscellanea*, resonates throughout the text itself in its repeated evocations of the torments of Christ on the cross, suggesting an understanding of identity as constituted through bodily, material and sensory practices in a manner I have here also attributed to Southwell, to whom she was related through the poet’s grandfather.⁴⁸ In an extraordinary and intricately interconnected series of metaphors Grymeston figures the resurrection (and the processes of martyrdom that imitate this pattern of extreme physical pain as a path to spiritual rebirth) as a

Silkworme [who] first eateth hir selfe out of a very little seed, and groweth to be a small worme: afterward when by feeding a certain time vpon fresh and greene leaues it is waxed of greater sise, eateth it selfe againe out of the other coate, and worketh it selfe into a case of silke; which when it hath once finished, in the end casting the seed for many yoong to breed of, and leauing the silke for mans ornament, dieth all white and winged, in shape of a flying thing...⁴⁹

The culmination of the silkworm’s existence is at once creative and destructive, engendering future generations while dying out itself; its final act is also an aesthetic one,

⁴⁷ Grymeston, *Miscellanea*, A2^r. On Grymeston’s biography, see Betty Travitsky, ‘Grymeston, Elizabeth (b. in or before 1563, d. 1601x4), *ODNB*.

⁴⁸ On Grymeston’s familial and literary connections to Southwell, see Ruth Hughey and Philip Hereford, ‘Elizabeth Grymeston and her *Miscellanea*,’ *The Library*, Fourth Series, XV.1 (June, 1934), 61-91, 78-79.

⁴⁹ Grymeston, *Miscellanea*, E1^v-E2^r.

as it takes on a new and wondrous form even at the moment of extinction. Grymeston goes on to compare this process to that of becoming a martyr, drawing parallels to the way that ‘when the persecution is greatest, they finally as need requireth, shed their blood, as seed for new offspring to arise of,’ an act of creative destruction just like that of the silkworm, with the similarly productive effect ‘that though the ripe fruit of the Church bee gathered, yet their blood engendreth new supply, and it increaseth the more, when the disincrease therof is violently procured’ (E2^r). Grymeston emphasizes the physicality of martyrdom, its violence and bloodshed, in a way designed not only to provoke contemplation but also spiritual action. As such she addresses dual audiences, recalling Southwell’s own *Epistle*; her son serves as a stand-in for a wider community of possible converts the text implicitly speaks to.

As such her writing shares with Southwell’s poetics an emphasis upon physical experience, which both authors utilize in the hope of galvanizing their dual readerships to act in the service of their faith. Southwell’s verse is written with the aim of generating not only a consolatory body of work, not only even to build an alternative church of the imagination, but also to inspire its readers to action. The physical suffering of Christ is emphasized at every turn, in a mode that recollects that of the medieval lover-knight lyrics. ‘Christs bloody sweate’ belongs firmly to this tradition, beginning with a stunning example of *versus rapportatus*, the first four lines forming a ‘magic square’ that can be read horizontally or vertically, and even across some of the diagonals:

Fatt soyle,	full springe,	sweete olive,	grape of blisse
That yeldes,	that streames,	that powres,	that dost distil
Untild,	undrawne,	unstampe,	untouchd of presse,
Deare fruit,	cleare brooks,	fayre oyle,	sweete wine at will

[Thus Christ unforc’d preventes in shedding bloode

The whippes the thornes the nailes the speare and roode.]⁵⁰

The magic square is not simply a dazzling display of virtuosity designed to inspire awe in Southwell's readers that will feed their religious devotion, although this is indeed part of its effect. It is also a poetic form that requires an active reader, one who will traverse and reverse its lines, dismantling and rebuilding the poem for themselves. Recusancy in late-Elizabethan England necessitated precisely the doublings and redoublings embodied in Southwell's verse here, poetry made flesh. In requiring his readers to treat his poem in this way, Southwell creates in miniature a mimetic representation of the very active form of piety he demands of them. As noted elsewhere in this collection, the word 'convert' is used more often as a verb than a noun in the early modern period; Southwell's understanding of true faith is fundamentally physical, a process of doing rather than a state of being, and as such he hopes to affect conversion by provoking his reader to act.

Southwell's poetry is richly invested with etymological puns and verbal play upon semantic histories that seek to engender this particularly active kind of response in his reader. One of his favourite such devices is the manipulation of the differing senses of 'kind' that I have explored in this essay. In the longer version of 'Saint Peters Complaynt', for instance, he describes sorrow as 'Sinnes eldest child: | Best, when unkind in killing who it bred.'⁵¹ Sorrow is 'unkind', in yet another sense of the word, 'uncharitable'. But sorrow is also 'unkind' in that in 'killing who it bred', sin, it commits an unnatural act, patricide, transgressing the familial relation and thus behaving as if from a different 'kind' or family. Elsewhere in Southwell's verse we encounter productive etymological play upon Saint Peter's 'stony name' ('Peter' derives from the Greek

⁵⁰ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 17.

⁵¹ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 64-85.

‘petros’, meaning ‘rock’) and a nod to the popular account of the origins of the name ‘God’ in ‘goodness’, in ‘I dye without desert’: ‘god mured in the good’, Southwell writes.⁵² On other occasions we find simpler play upon shared linguistic origins. Southwell reminds his readers of the distance between God’s creatures and his act of divine creation, miraculously bridged, in ‘Looke home’, observing that ‘The mind a creature is, yet can create’.⁵³ In ‘Lew’d Love is Losse’, it is the aural similtude between two words falsely hinting at a shared etymological root that produces Southwell’s line, ‘A locke it proves that first was but a looke’.⁵⁴ And a strikingly Spenserian piece of verse, ‘In all things mutable, but mutabilities,’ from ‘Fortunes Falsehood’, enacts the processes of semantic generation by which words give rise to other words, the same in ‘kind’ yet not the same, their grammatical offspring.⁵⁵ At moments like these, Southwell’s poetry is generative, in the fullest sense of this word. His language, I would suggest, generates yet more language; his poetry grows out of the etymological and semantic possibilities of the individual word, seeking to bring about a change in religious affiliation by changing his readers’ relationship to their own linguistic universe.

The aim of what I have termed Southwell’s generative poetics is then singular and transparent. Writing was Southwell’s chosen means of ministering to the subterranean Catholic community, for his generation a ‘congregation denied a church,’ which he saw as ‘souls denied access to emotional engagement with their God’; Anne Sweeney goes on to make clear that his poetry ‘was written to redress that loss’.⁵⁶ It is difficult to ascertain

⁵² Hence Christ’s famous declaration, ‘I will build my Church upon this rock’. Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 42.

⁵³ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 49.

⁵⁴ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 54.

⁵⁵ Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 56.

⁵⁶ Anne Sweeney, Introduction to Southwell, *Collected Poems*, xiii.

the extent to which Southwell succeeded in constructing his virtual church. The wide circulation and influence of his poetry and prose amongst both Catholic and Protestant audiences, of his own and subsequent generations, as outlined in this essay suggest some measure of success, although not always of a kind Southwell himself would have desired or envisaged. His effectiveness in converting genre and gender conventions into a poetics that privileges bodily experience is more readily apparent, I have argued here. Likewise, we have no record of Richard Southwell's response to the *Epistle* from his son. But in 1600, five years after Robert Southwell's death, Henry Garnett wrote to Aquaviva, Superior General of the Jesuits, to tell him: 'Mr Southwell, Robert's father, has just died a Catholic.'⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Quoted in Devlin's *Life of Robert Southwell*, 203.